Meaning: From literalism to Contextualism

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Abstract

The present study is devoted to deal with the two types of meaning: the literal meaning and the non-literal meaning. The literal meaning is the conventional meaning or the dictionary meaning of words and sentences independent from context(Recanati,2004: 79-80) . Concerning the contextual meaning or the non-literal meaning, it refers to the type of meaning that doesn't deal with the dictionary meaning, it accounts for the contextual factors which may be physical, linguistic or social. The interpretation of the sentence regardless of the context causes so many problems in conveying the exact intended speaker's meaning. The aim of this paper is to study the difference between the literal and non-literal meaning, How some words and sentences can be interpreted literally and others are interpreted in terms of context. As a result, there are some sentences that can be interpreted literally independent from context. Other sentences require a departure from its literal meaning.

المستخلص

كرست الدراسة الحالية لنوعين من أنواع المعنى : المعنى الحرفي والمعنى غير الحرفي (السياقي). يعرف المعنى الحرفي بالمعنى التقليدي أو القاموسي للكلمات والجمل بمعزل عن السياق. أما فيما يخص معنى السياق فأنه يشير إلى نوع المعنى الذي لا يتعامل مع المعنى القاموسي وإنما يأخذ بنظر الاعتبار عناصر السياق التي قد تكون مادية، لغوية أو اجتماعية. تكمن مشكلة البحث في أن تفسير الجملة بمعزل عن السياق يسبب عدة مشاكل في نقل معنى المتكلم المقصود الدقيق. تهدف الدراسة إلى ترسيخ الفرق بين المعنى الحرفي و غير الحرفي وكيفية تفسير بعض الجمل والكلمات حرفيا وأخرى بموجب السياق. بالنتيجة نجد ان بعض الجمل يمكن أن تفسر حرفيا بمعزل عن السياق ، بينما تتطلب جمل أخرى أن تعزل عن معناها الحرفي.

1. Introduction

In the period between 1930s and 1960s, there have been several schools of thought ,in linguistics , believe that context, which is the knowledge of the world outside language that interferes in interpreting it, should be excluded from language analysis as far as possible. Therefore, linguists will be able to make discoveries about language itself and its system of rules regardless of the circumstances in which it is used. (Cook, 1989:10)

In twentieth-century linguistics, there have also been influential approaches which studies language in terms of context. They study language as a part of society and the world. The interest in studying language in terms of context can be seen in the work of J.R. Firth, who sees language as part of culture and it is affected by the environment, not as an autonomous system. (ibid.:12)

Thus it is of importance to pay attention to the interpretation of sentence and utterance meaning in relation to context in which they are used. Concerning sentences, they are context-sensitive and their meaning needs to account for the context of use. The interpretation of any word or sentence depends mainly on the speaker's intention. A speaker may speak directly by using direct or literal language. But sometimes he may speak indirectly. So the hearer can arrive at the accurate interpretation by accounting for the contextual features or the circumstances of the utterance.

2. Literal Meaning

The study of literal meaning is considered a field related to philosophy of language. The term literal meaning is associated with semantics. Semantics can be defined as a field of linguistics which concentrates on the literal meaning of words, phrases and sentences. (Fasold, 2006: 137)

Recently, there is a trend among linguists to restrict semantics. Some linguists exclude the context and interpret the meaning of words in isolation from context. They try to interpret any sentence according to its literal meaning regardless of the contextual factors which may affect the interpretation. Interpreting the sentence meaning in terms of context represents a problem of which Bloomfield was aware .If linguists try to include the context in defining the meaning, or if semantics is studied in relation to context, then semantics will have unlimited scope. Katz & Fodor (1963: 174-9) argue that if there is an ambiguity in a sentence, it can be disambiguated by expanding the sentence rather than putting it in a certain context.

For example: I'll go to the bank. This sentence has an ambiguity because the word bank has more than one meaning. It may mean a financial instruction or part of a river. So to resolve this ambiguity one should say: I'll go to the bank because I need some money. Thus the sentence is disambiguated by extending it. (Palmer, 1981: 48- 49)

The literal meaning deals with what is said but not with what is implicated or wanted to be conveyed. Actually, the literal meaning is context-independent. If the meaning of an utterance or a sentence accounts for the contextual factors whether social, physical or linguistic, this type of meaning will be non-literal meaning. In addition the literal meaning of an expression represents the conventional meaning which denies the role of the speaker`s intention. When the speaker uses the ordinary sense of the word or the sentence, this means that he is speaking literally. By contrast, if the speaker means something that is not understood by the conventional meaning of the words, he will deal with the non-literal meaning. For example: John

is hungry. To analyze the meaning of this sentence literally means to know the meaning of each word in the sentence as it is found in the dictionary or to know the concept to which each word refers. In this sentence, the word "John" refers to "a male person ", the word "is" is a present form of the verb "be", "hungry" means having a strong desire and need for food. This analysis of meaning is context-independent. But if the meaning of this sentence is analyzed according to certain contextual factors, it may imply offering some food for John. This kind of interpretation takes into account the speaker`s meaning or what the speaker implies. (Recanati, 2004: 79-80)

The central idea of Literalism is to reduce the context-sensitivity in contrast to contextualism which considers it to be an essential feature of language. Consequently, Literalism tries to make no difference between what is actually said which represents the literal meaning ,and what is implicated which represents the speaker`s meaning. (ibid.: 107)

Akmajian et al. (1995:215) say that there are two important types of meaning. The first one is the linguistic meaning which is conveyed by the literal use of the words. The second one is the speaker`s meaning depending on the speaker`s intention which sometimes refers to something different from what the words mean. This type of meaning can be conveyed by the non-literal use of words.

2.1.Word Meaning

The study of word meaning often referred to as "Lexical Semantics". Lexical semantics is the field that studies the meaning of an individual word which is called "a lexical item". There are three points to be taken into consideration in dealing with lexical semantics. Firstly, to deal essentially with content words which are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs rather than with function words which are articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions. Secondly, dealing with semantics implies dealing with descriptive meaning and denying "emotive" or "connotative" meaning. Thirdly, the meaning of each word has two faces: the first refers to an element in

language system which is affected by its relationship with other elements in this system. The second face is that each word refers to an object in the outer world. (Aitchison, 1999: 83-84)

As mentioned previously, each single word carries a lexical meaning. The words that have lexical meanings are called “lexemes” or “lexical items”. This meaning is stored in the speaker's mind, or in the mental dictionary which is called the “lexicon”. The lexicon contains the knowledge stored in the mind of language users. The lexical meanings, which each person has in his mental lexicon, are concepts not words. The lexeme is an entity which is used in the language system and it can be used to build up phrases and sentences according to the rules of grammar of the language. In fact, words or lexemes can be classified into different grammatical categories such as: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. These grammatical categories specify the way in which these lexemes used in the sentences. (Lobner, 2002:40)

As far as semantics is concerned, the meaning of words, phrases or sentences represent what they conventionally mean rather than what a speaker means or intend to say. Dealing with the conventional meaning implies to deal with the conceptual meaning, but not with associative or connotative meaning. The conventional meaning deals with the type of meaning that is conveyed by using the literal meaning of the word. Furthermore, each word in a language represents a concept which can be represented by the semantic features and the meaning which are found in the dictionary regardless of what a speaker means by using the word. (Yule, 2006:100)

As an example, to analyze the meaning of the word “pen”, one needs to know the concept to which this word denotes. It refers to” an instrument used for writing”. The conceptual meaning of this word does not account for the associative meaning which may imply “studying”, “knowledge” or "school". (ibid.)

To sum up, word meaning or lexical semantics deals with how the word is normally used, and how it refers to the dictionary meaning. The dictionary meaning

of any word is the literal meaning of the word undetermined by the physical, social or linguistic surroundings. To identify the literal meaning of a word is to exclude the context and look at the meaning of the word is isolation. (Verschueren, 1999:5)

2.2. Sentence Meaning and Compositionality

Sentence meaning is described by semanticists as compositional meaning. The compositional semantics is considered as a subfield of semantics and it is sometimes termed as formal semantics. It is developed in the early 1970s. The compositional meaning means that the meaning of the sentence is built up by combining the meanings of its parts. The smallest parts of the sentence which are lexemes acquire their meanings from the lexicon which is the mental dictionary, then linking these meanings together with respect to the grammatical structure of the sentence. (Fasold, 2006:141)

To explain the meaning of a sentence like: The boy ate an apple. There are two points to be taken into consideration. first, knowing the meaning of each word or the smallest parts of the sentence;Second, knowing the grammatical structure of the sentence. Starting with the meaning of the content words in this sentence, the word “boy” means “a male person”, the word “eat” refers to “the process of putting food into the mouth, chewing and swallowing it”, and the word “apple” refers to “a kind of fruit” Looking at the grammatical structure that is the morphological and the syntactic structure of this sentence, “the” is a definite article, “boy” is a singular common noun, “ate” is composed of two morphemes, the verb “eat” and the morpheme “-ed” which refers to the past tense, and ”an” is an indefinite article followed by a singular noun like " apple". So the meaning of this sentence consists of the meanings of its parts and its grammatical structure(ibid.).

Similarly, Lobner (2002:13) says that the compositional meaning is determined by three factors: the lexical meaning, the grammatical meaning and the syntactic structure. The grammatical meaning helps to explain the form of the word and its contribution to the meaning of the sentence. The verb form “ate” is a simple

past form consists of “eat+ed”. The progressive which is called indicative mood “was eating”. The conditional “would eat”. “Boys” is a plural noun consists of two morphemes “boy+ plural(s)”. Also the grammatical forms include comparative and superlative constructions, positive, tense…etc.

These forms have an effect on the compositional meaning of the sentence. The third factor which determines the compositional meaning is the syntactic structure. The syntactic structure guides the process in which the meanings of the words in their given grammatical forms are combined into a whole to produce the complete meaning of the sentence. The syntactic structure helps to guide the interpretation of the complex expressions. The combination rule helps to explain how certain words are combined together to form a syntactic structure. In the previous example, “the boy ate an apple”, there are certain rules to combine the meaning of this sentence. Firstly, a rule to derive the meaning of the article-noun (NP) from the meaning of the article and the meaning of the noun. In this sentence there are two noun phrases, the first one function as a subject “the boy” and the second one function as an indirect object “an apple”. Syntactically, the verb and the noun phrase which follow it constitute a unit known as “verb phrase” which is finally combined with the subject to constitute the sentence as a whole. The semantic composition is known as “bottom-up“ process. This process means to begin from the smallest unit (i.e. the lexical meaning of the words) up to the largest one which is sentence semantics. Consequently, sentence semantics involves the relationship between syntax and semantics. Actually, the principle of compositionality works on the level of expression meaning or literal meaning and it doesn`t hold for the level of utterance meaning. (Lobner, 2002: 12 -15)

3. Minimalism

The literal meaning of any sentence or utterance is characterized by the fact that it is strictly related to the conventional meaning of the sentence or the utterance. This meaning is free from context. There is no need to include any contextual element to interpret the sentence or to make it propositional. But in some cases,

there is a need to depart from the conventional meaning of the sentence and to include some contextual elements only when it is necessary to make the meaning propositional. This is what Recanati (2004) called Minimalism. The term minimalism means to minimize the distance between sentence meaning and what is said. This minimal departure from the literal meaning helps to complete the meaning of the sentence.

In saying, for example, she is clever, the literal meaning of this sentence is incomplete without having a reference to the physical context. The problem in this sentence is with the pronoun "she", there is a need to refer to the context to interpret such sentence. This process requires a minimal departure from the literal meaning of the sentence to the contextual meaning only to complete its meaning with the required information. Accordingly this minimal departure from the literal meaning is governed by the conventions of the language. So minimalism admits the importance of the role of the speaker`s meaning in determining truth-conditions, but including speaker`s meaning in the interpretation should be controlled by the conventional meaning of the sentence. (Recanati, 2004: 12-13; Recanati, 2005: 4)

4. Contextualism

The previous section focuses on the literal meaning or the conceptual meaning. This section is devoted to deal with another type of meaning which is the non-literal meaning. To use a word or a sentence non-literally means to deal with the invisible meaning of the speaker and to account for the context in which it is used. The speaker may say something but he intends something else to be understood by the hearer. Many factors may interfere to give the sentence or the utterance the meaning which is not conveyed by the literal use of it. If someone says, Time is money or She is a ball of fire, analyzing these sentences literally will not lead to the intended meaning of the speaker. These sentences require non-literal interpretation. The intended meaning of the first sentence is that "time is valuable" and the intended meaning of the second sentence is that "she`s got a lot of energy". This interpretation has no relation to the dictionary meaning of the words. (Recanati,

2005: 4) Also if one says: It is raining heavily outside. The speaker of this sentence may not intend to inform the hearer that “it is raining heavily”, rather he may want to advise him not to go out or to take an umbrella with him. The speaker, here, doesn't say literally “Don't go out now”, instead he tries to convey his idea by using non-literal utterance (ibid.).

This is also called the “implied meaning” or the speaker's meaning. Similarly, the sentence: Tom is thirsty, may imply to offer him a drink. This type of non-literal meaning related to what is called “conversational implicatures”. It may mean that the meaning of a sentence or an utterance implies things rather than what is literally understood by it. Furthermore, indirect speech act involves contextual interference to interpret the meaning. For example, Can you open the door, please? , this sentence is in the form of a question but the intention of the speaker is a request. (Recanati, 2004: 80-82; Akmajian et al., 1995: 360)

Context refers to the circumstances or environment in which language is used. The study of meaning that is interpreted in terms of context belongs to the area of language study called “pragmatics”. There are many factors which influence the interpretation, some of which are social, physical, linguistic and background knowledge. The contextual information helps one limit the possible interpretations. In other words, it constrains the interpretation. (Brown and Yule, 1983: 27)

The non-literal meaning may be used for the purpose of irony, sarcasm, or metaphor. If a person says, George is so clever! In such a way that may be understood by the hearer that he is so stupid. Here, the speaker doesn't mean what he said literally. Similarly, if one says: She is an angel. Certainly the speaker means that she is merciful, beautiful and has good features so the speaker ,in this sentence , speaks metaphorically. This kind of interpretation depends essentially on the speaker`s intention. (Akmajian et al., 1995: 215)

4.1. The Syntactic Context

Syntax can be defined as the organization of words in sentences. Words are organized by considering the order and relationship among them to make a

meaningful sentence. The organization of words has particular structures that determines the meaning. Therefore, the meaning of a sentence is highly dependent on the structure of the sentence. Looking for the meaning of a sentence involves the relationship between syntax and semantics. Therefore, the compositional meaning of any sentence is formed by analyzing its syntactic structure and the lexical meanings of the words. The syntactic context restricts the use of words in the sentence and the form of these words. (Lobner, 2002:13)

The syntactic context refers to the syntactic agreement among words in the sentence. For example, there must be an agreement between the subject and the verb in the sentence in number and an agreement based on the category of person. It is not possible to use a plural noun with a verb containing third person singular "s". The different forms of English pronouns are described depending on two categories: person and number. "I" is used for first person singular, "you" for second person singular and "he, she, it" for third person singular. In addition, the verb form can be described depending on another category which is called "tense". The tense of the verb also has an effect in determining the meaning of the sentence. Also the active and passive voices are represented by different grammatical structures. These structures will affect the meaning of the sentence. For example:

Rose loves her cat.

Rose is loved by her cat.

The content words in these two sentences are the same, but the meaning is different because they have two different structures. The first structure is in the active voice. It describes what "Rose" does. It means that she performs the action of the verb. The second structure is in the form of passive voice. It is used to describe what happens to "Rose". It means that she doesn't perform the action. The last category is gender. In the previous example, there is an agreement between the noun "Rose" and the pronoun "her". This agreement is based on the distinction between

references to male entities "he, his", the female entities "she, her" and things "it, its". (Yule, 2006: 76)

4.2. The Semantic Context

This topic deals with explaining how the semantic context of a certain word, sentence, or an utterance interferes in its interpretation and the effect of the context in determining the meaning. The semantic context also helps to show how the context restricts the possible interpretations of the word. Trying to analyze the meaning of certain expression involves knowing the effect of the context on this expression in order to arrive at an accurate interpretation. This process is called top-down process. It means that the meaning of a word is derived from the meaning of the sentence in which it is used. This process is the reverse of the bottom-up process which means that the interpretation of any sentence involves combining the meaning of the words in the sentence with respect to its grammatical structure. The bottom-up process explains how the principle of compositionality tries to interpret sentences, while the up-down process shows the effect of context on the meaning of the smallest units in the sentence. For example, All the pupils answered the question correctly. Actually the word “pupil” has more than one lexical meaning in the dictionary. It may mean “a student at school” or it may refer to the “pupil in the eye” But in this sentence, it is clear that the speaker means “a student at school”. This interpretation is the result of analyzing the semantic meaning of other words in the sentence. Therefore, the semantic meaning of other words helps to limit the possible lexical meanings of the word and to give the word the accurate meaning. (Lobner, 2002: 9-15)

4.3. The pragmatic Context

Pragmatics covers the study of language use. It studies the way in which linguistic properties and contextual factors participate in the interpretation of an utterance. Generally the pragmatic context of an utterance includes:-

1-The physical situation or the environment in which the utterance happens.

2-The linguistic context or the co-text which refers to the preceding and sometimes following texts. That is the set of other words or sentences used in the same text. (Wilson and Allot, 2005 : 1-4)

The pragmatic context shows how the aspects of language structure such as phonological, syntactic and semantic combine with the surroundings or the circumstances of the sentence which are facts about the speaker, audience, time and place of the utterance in order to arrive at a particular interpretation of an utterance in context. So ,the goal of pragmatics is to bridge the gap between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning. The properties which include some information about the speaker, listener and the environment in which the sentence is uttered are called non-linguistic properties. Consequently, pragmatics deals with the study of context-dependent aspects of interpretation, while grammar studies the context-independent aspect of interpretation. (ibid.;Trask, 1999: 123-124)

In order to analyze or interpret a sentence or an utterance in terms of context, the analyst pays more attention to the relationship between the speaker and the utterance in particular circumstances or uses, than to the relationship between one sentence and another regardless to the use. The relationship between the speaker and the hearer is investigated by terms such as: reference, inference, implicature and presupposition. As a result, the analyst describes what the speaker and the hearer are doing. (Brown and Yule, 1983: 27)

Reference is a term used to refer to the relationship between linguistics language and non-linguistic world or the physical world in which the language is used. Yule (1996:17) says that “reference is an act in which a speaker, or writer, uses linguistic forms to enable a listener, or reader, to identify something”. These linguistic forms are called referring expressions. They can be proper nouns like: Chomsky, New York, Shakespeare, or pronouns like: he, she, they, her…etc. It may

also be also noun phrases as: the writer, the city, a boy, a beautiful place. In fact, choosing one type of these referring expressions depends on what the speaker expects or supposes about the listener's knowledge. In physical contexts, pronouns are used as deictic expressions. Deictic expressions or deixis are words that need a physical context to be interpreted. Deixis include: pronouns as it, they, her, as well as adverbs of time and place as: yesterday, now, here, there, this…etc. (ibid.)

Turning to presupposition, it is a term used to refer to the speaker's assumption about what is true or known by a listener. If someone says, Where did you find the book?, the speaker here presupposes that you have lost a book. This presupposition depends on the background knowledge of the speaker. The interpretation of the above sentence involves more than knowing the linguistic context, it needs also knowing some information about the speaker, listener and the occasion on which the sentence is used or said. (Yule,2006: 117)

4.4. The Linguistic Context

Trying to identify some expressions, more specifically, intended referents involves more than just understanding the referring expression. It also depends on the linguistic material accompanying the referring expression. The linguistic context helps to limit the possible interpretations for an expression. For example: The white house denounced the agreement. The referring expression "the white house" refers to the "president of the white house".

The linguistic context which is also termed as "the co-text" is considered as the linguistic part of the environment in which an expression is used. Reference is considered as a social act. This means that the speaker makes an assumption that the expression he used to identify a person or an object will be interpreted according to speaker`s intention. (Yule, 1996: 21; Finch,2005:208-209)

Consequently, the co-text refers to the set of other words that precedes or follows the word or the sentence. So the interpretation of an utterance or a sentence is restricted by what precedes or follows it. Brown and Yule (1983: 49) try to "stress

the power of co-text in constraining interpretation ". The interpretation of a word or a sentence can be made clear by the linguistic environment even if the information about the speaker, the listener, the time and place of the utterance is absent. If one says, for example:

The bill is large. It must be paid.

The linguistic context of the word "bill" limits the possible interpretation of the word. Knowing the meaning of the other words in the sentence constrains the interpretation. Therefore, the intended meaning of this sentence is understood without requiring information about the circumstances in which it is uttered. (Brown and Yule, 1983: 46-49)

Anaphora is an example of the effect of the linguistic context in interpreting or understanding the sentence. Yule (2006: 116) defines it as "a subsequent reference to an already introduced entity". Usually the first mention of an entity is called "antecedent", and the subsequent expression is an example of anaphora which means "referring back". Pronouns are anaphoric expressions used for the sake of contextual cohesion. Pronouns are used to make a connection between an antecedent and an anaphoric expression. The selection of the pronoun depends on the antecedent to which it refers. For example:

Jane went to the hospital because she was sick. Dr.Brown gave her some medicine and he advised her to make the pills three times a day ,this sentence contains many anaphoric expressions. The subject pronoun "she" and the object pronoun "her" refer to the antecedent "Jane" which is mentioned before, and "he" refers to the antecedent "Dr.Brown". (ibid.: 116-117)

4.5. The Situational Context

The context of situation refers to the immediate physical environment or the situation where the interaction takes place at the time of speaking. The context of situation is a term usually associated with two scholars: Malinowski who was an anthropologist and Firth who was a linguist. They were interested in analyzing

meaning in terms of the context of use. They stress the importance of the situational context in understanding the meaning. Firth (1950:43-4,1957:182-9,1968:177)cited in Palmer (1981:53) considers the context of situation as a part of the linguistic analyses of a language. He suggests that the context of situation can be grouped and classified according to the following categories:

1-The relevant information of the participants, persons, personalities.

a-The verbal action of the participants.

b-The non-verbal action of the participants.

2-The relevant objects.

3-The effect of the verbal action. (Palmer, 1981: 53-54)

The situational context refers to the physical world or the environment in which language is used. The most studied ways of relating language choices into a physical world are temporal deixis and spatial deixis as well as person deixis. Temporal deixis are words used to refer to a time such as: now, yesterday, then, next week…etc. For example:

<u>John will start looking at a job tomorrow.</u>

<u>Tom went to France last week.</u>

Concerning spatial deixis, they are words used to refer to the location where the action happens such as: here, there, near that…etc. For example:

<u>He sat near that.</u>

<u>You can find the book over there.</u>

These expressions need to refer to the physical context to be interpreted. It is not possible to interpret what is meant by "there" or "near that" without referring to the situational context of the utterance. Similarly, person deixis refers to the pronouns. Pronouns are used to refer to something which is known by the hearer, by the physical or situational environment. Without knowing the situational context of

the utterance, the hearer will not be able to identify or to interpret the utterance. If someone points to black clouds in the sky and says: will this bring rain? , the hearer of this sentence will not be able to identify the meaning of "this" without knowing the context in which this sentence is said. (Yule, 2006: 115)

Brown and Yule (1983:35)argue that the situational context has a great effect on the interpretation of sentences or utterances. The same sentence may have different meanings if the situation or the circumstances in which it is uttered are different.

Hymes (1962) cited in Brown and Yule (1983: 38) says that the role of context in the interpretation has two functions. First, it limits the range of possible interpretations. Second, it supports the intended interpretation. He explains that when a linguistic form is used, it identifies a range of interpretations. A context can support a range of meanings. When a linguistic form is used in a certain context, it drops the possible meanings to that context other than the meanings which can be signaled by this form. In addition, the context drops the possible meanings to the form other than the meanings which can be supported by the context.

5.Conclusion

This research focuses on the way of interpreting words, sentences and utterances. There are some words and sentences which can be interpreted literally by taking into consideration the dictionary meaning or the conventional meaning only. The principle of compositionality or the bottom-up process is a useful way to interpret some sentences by the combination of the dictionary meanings of the words and the grammatical meanings with respect to the syntactic structure of the sentence. This process can be used only when there is no need to account for the context of use, or there is no word in the sentence which requires some information from the context.

Nevertheless, the principle of compositionality fails to give the accurate interpretation of some sentences which are context-dependent. Their meaning cannot be understood without referring to the context in which they are used. The interference of the context sometimes is governed by the conventions of language. It means that the sentence needs a minimal departure from the literal meaning only to complete its meaning or to make it propositional. But there are some sentences that need more than this minimal departure to interpret them.

There are many factors which affect the interpretation of the sentence or the utterance: Some of which are linguistic and others are situational. The linguistic factors work on the linguistic material or the text in which the sentence is used. Turning to the situational factors, they give information from the situation or the physical environment in which the sentence is uttered. The context has the benefit of limiting the possible interpretation of the sentence and helping the interpreter arrive at the accurate intended meaning.

Finally, the interpretation of any non-literal utterance depends essentially on the speaker's intention. The speaker's intention governs the way in which the utterance is interpreted. When the speaker speaks directly, the interpretation will be literal or goes beyond the literal meaning minimally. But when the speaker says an utterance in an indirect language, the interpretation will be non-literal. There is no role for the literal meaning in the sentences which are used for the purpose of irony, sarcasm, or metaphor. They require non-literal interpretation depending on the intention of the speaker.

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